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ABSTRACT

This book consists of 17 essays about living with the land and the importance of reinvigorating the values of rural life. The essays include personal reflections about growing up in rural Minnesota and opinions about the state of neglected rural towns and people. The author grew up during the 1950s on an 80-acre farm that his family rented in Rosewood Township, Minnesota. His father supplied the tools, the labor, and the seeds and kept two-thirds of the crop. His family lived off of the land--every summer his mother canned vegetables, fruits, jams, sauces, and meats for the winter. The book suggests that the industrialization of farming has marginalized rural culture and led to the impoverishment of rural towns and communities. Bread baking provides an example of how industrialization changed everyday life. When store-bought bread replaced home baking, the family abandoned more than a habit of living--they lost a piece of rural culture that influenced various aspects of their quality of life. Since 1910, industrialization has reduced the farm workforce from about 50 percent of the U.S. population to less than 2 percent and led to the development of a handful of huge, agribusiness corporations that dominate the American agricultural economy. The book suggests that individuals should oppose any economy that sees people as an expendable resource, that does not consider the health of communities, and that defines reductions in human labor as efficient regardless of nonpecuniary consequences. It questions what kind of values rural people are teaching their children when they sell themselves, in the name of economic development, as ideally suited to the least attractive kinds of factory work, or when they allow the rest of society to dump its toxic trash on rural land for the sake of a few jobs. Recommendations are offered for education, agriculture, and economic development that will reinvigorate rural communities and a rural way of life. (LP)

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